

## Utility Issues

Indiana Department of Homeland Security

Interagency Press Release Bank



# Utility Issues

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# Utility Issues

## Utility Issues

### Preparing for a Utility Outage

Be ready before an emergency:

- Locate the electric, gas and water shut-off valves.
- Keep necessary tools near gas and water shut-off valves.
- Teach family members how to turn off utilities.
- Learn how to safely and properly switch water lines and circuit breakers back on once utilities have been restored.

If you turn the gas off, a professional must turn it back on. Do NOT attempt to do this yourself.

Take protective actions:

- Keep a battery-powered radio and flashlight; have an extra supply of fresh batteries.
- Store essential supplies such as flashlights, batteries, a portable radio, water, non-perishable foods, blankets and a manual can-opener.
- Due to the extreme risk of fires do NOT use candles during a power outage.
- Do NOT use charcoal indoors. Without proper ventilation, fumes from burnt charcoal can create a deadly situation.
- Do NOT run a generator inside a home or garage.
- If you use a generator, connect the equipment you want to power directly to the outlets on the generator. Do NOT connect a generator to a home's electrical system
- Listen to NOAA Weather Radio, local radio and television for updated information.
- For power outages or downed wires, call your utility company.

Prepare for a power outage:

Refrigeration:

- If you have space in your refrigerator or freezer, consider filling plastic containers with water, leaving about an inch of space inside each one (Remember, water expands as it freezes, so it is important to leave room in the container for the water to expand.). Place the containers in the refrigerator and freezer. This chilled or frozen water will help keep food cold if the power goes

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out, by displacing air that can warm up quickly with water or ice that keeps cold for several hours without additional refrigeration.

- If you use medication that requires refrigeration, most can be kept in a closed refrigerator for several hours without a problem. If unsure, check with your physician or pharmacist.

### Electronics:

- If you use a computer, keep files and operating systems backed up regularly. Consider buying extra batteries and a power converter if you use a laptop computer. A power converter allows most laptops (12 volts or less) to be operated from the cigarette lighter of a vehicle.
- Turn off all computers, monitors, printers, copiers, scanners and other devices when they are not being used. That way, if the power goes out, this equipment will have already been safely shut down.
- Get a high quality surge protector for all of your computer equipment. If you use the computer a lot, such as for a home business, consider purchasing and installing an Uninterruptable Power Supply (UPS). Consult with your local computer equipment dealer about available equipment and costs.
- If you have a telephone instrument or system at home or at work that requires electricity to work (such as a cordless phone or answering machine), plan for alternate communication, including having a standard telephone handset, cellular telephone, radio or pager.

### Remote services:

Remember, too, that some voicemail systems and remote dial-up servers for computer networks may not operate when the power is out where these systems are located. So even if you have power, your access to remote technology may be interrupted if the power that serves those areas is disrupted.

Check with remote service providers to see if they have backup power systems and how long those systems will operate.

### Access and transportation:

- If you have an electric garage door opener, find out where the manual release lever is located and learn how to operate it. Sometimes garage doors can be heavy, so get help to lift it. If you regularly use the garage as the primary means of entering your home upon return from work, be sure to keep a key to your house with you, in case the garage door will not open.

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- Keep your car fuel tank at least half full because gas stations rely on electricity to power their pumps.

Special preparation information for people with disabilities:

- If you use a battery-operated wheelchair, life-support system, or other power-dependent equipment, call your power company before a power outage. Many utility companies keep a list and map of the locations of power-dependent customers in case of an emergency. Ask them what alternatives are available in your area. Contact the customer service department of your local utility company to learn if this service is available in your community.
- If you use a motorized wheelchair or scooter, have an extra battery. A car battery also can be used with a wheelchair but will not last as long as a wheelchair's deep-cycle battery. If available, store a lightweight manual wheelchair for backup.
- If you are blind or have a visual disability, store a talking or Braille clock or large-print timepiece with extra batteries.
- If you are deaf or have hearing loss, consider getting a small, portable, battery-operated television set. Emergency broadcasts may give information in American Sign Language or open captioning.

### Safety During a Power Outage

Food safety:

- Use food supplies wisely. Use refrigerated foods first, frozen second and non-perishable foods last.
- Remember that perishable items from the refrigerator can be kept cool for about four hours if the refrigerator is left closed.
- Melt ice cubes for additional drinking water.

Chemical safety:

- Look for combustible liquids like gasoline, lighter fluid and paint thinner that may have spilled.
- Thoroughly clean any spills and place containers in a well-ventilated area.
- Keep combustible liquids away from heat sources.

Electrical safety:

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- Turn off or disconnect all appliances when there is an outage. When the power is restored, turn them on one by one to prevent an overload.
- Shut off or disconnect all major equipment, as well as the heating or air conditioning./ system that might be in operation at the time of outage.
- Unplug sensitive electronic equipment. When power is restored, use surge protectors to protect computers, fax machines, answering machines, televisions, stereos and appliances.
- If your home has sustained flood or water damage, and you can safely get to the main breaker or fuse box, turn off the power.
- Assume all wires on the ground are electrically charged. This includes cable TV feeds.
- Be aware of and avoid downed utility lines. Report downed or damaged power lines to the utility company or emergency services.
- Remove standing water, wet carpets and furnishings. Air dry out your home with good ventilation before restoring power.
- Do not use extension cords between homes or across yards or streets. Such use could cause electrocution and fire.
- Have a licensed electrician check your home for damage.
- Call your local utility company to report the outage. Don't assume someone else will report it.
- Use your mobile phone to access the utility's website, as it may track outage information and provide restoration updates.
- Use your mobile phone to follow the utility on Twitter (if it has an account) for restoration updates.
- If you experience an emergency or have a life threatening condition, call 911.

### Fire safety:

- Be careful when using candles. Keep the flame away from combustible objects and out of reach of children.
- Smoke alarms may be dependent on your home's electrical service and could be inoperative during a power outage. Check to see if your smoke alarm uses a back-up battery and install a new battery at least once a year.
- If there is a fire hydrant near your home, keep it clear of debris for easy access by the fire department.

### Gas safety:

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- Smell and listen for leaky gas connections. If you believe there is a gas leak, immediately leave the house and leave the door(s) open. Do not turn switches on or off, leave them as they are.
- Never strike a match. Any size flame can spark an explosion.
- Before turning the gas back on, have the gas system checked by a professional.

### Generator safety:

- Follow manufactures' instructions and guidelines when using generators.
- Use a generator or other fuel-powered machine outside the home. Carbon monoxide fumes are odorless and can quickly overwhelm you indoors.
- Use the appropriate size and type of power cords to carry the electric load. Overloaded cords can overheat and cause fires.
- Never run cords under rugs or carpets where heat might build up or damage to a cord may go unnoticed.
- Never connect generators to another power source such as power lines. The reverse flow of electricity or "back feed" can electrocute an unsuspecting utility worker.

\*Be sure to pay special attention to any messages coming from local utility companies in the case of a power outage.

### Beware of Carbon Monoxide Poisoning

Portable, electric generators are used by many families and businesses to combat power outages and have become an increasing cause of death, according to the National Fire Protection Association. Carbon monoxide poisoning from the use of fuel-burning appliances kills more than 200 people each year and sends about 10,000 to hospital emergency rooms for treatment. Others die from carbon monoxide produced while burning charcoal inside a home, garage, vehicle or tent, or from carbon monoxide produced by cars unintentionally left running in attached garages or gas-powered generators when the exhaust accumulates in living spaces.

The risk of carbon monoxide poisoning is particularly high during the cold weather season, and you should stay alert to the risk of poisoning when spending more time in vehicles, or using unfamiliar fuel-burning heaters, generators or appliances in and around your home. Opening doors and windows or operating fans will not guarantee your safety. By knowing and practicing the following guidelines, you will be able to decrease your and your neighbors' risk of poisoning.

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General precautions to follow:

- Have your traditional heating system inspected annually.
- Never warm up a motor vehicle in a garage, even if the door is open. Also, have your vehicle checked for exhaust leaks.
- Be sure all fuel burning sources such as gas, wood stoves, fireplaces and portable heaters are working properly and their flues or chimneys have been inspected.
- Never burn charcoal inside.
- Never use a gas range or oven for home heating.
- If the structure you are in is air tight and lacks ventilation, crack a window for fresh air.
- Battery-operated Carbon Monoxide (CO) alarms or plug-in CO alarms with battery back-up should be installed in the home.
- If the CO alarm sounds and someone in the home is experiencing symptoms, immediately evacuate and call 9-1-1.

If the alarm goes off and no one has symptoms, air out the home, turn off fuel-burning appliances and reset the carbon monoxide alarm. If elevated levels remain, the alarm will sound again after approximately six minutes. If the alarm sounds again, call a qualified heating contractor for inspection. Don't use any fuel-burning appliances until they have been inspected.

Symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning include:



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- Flu like symptoms, with no fever
- Nausea, vomiting
- Dizziness
- Irregular breathing
- Confusion
- Fainting
- Fatigue and weakness
- Drowsiness
- Headache
- Confusion
- Feeling better after leaving a particular structure, but feeling ill upon return.

### Precautions when using a generator:

- Never use gasoline- or diesel-powered electric generators in an enclosed area.
- Always operate a generator outside, in a well ventilated location—away from all doors, windows and vent openings so that exhaust fumes cannot enter the home through windows or other building openings.
- Do NOT refuel a generator while it is running. The generator should be turned off and allowed to cool down before being refueled.
- Fuel for the generator should never be stored in the home. Gasoline and other flammable liquids should be stored outside of living areas in properly labeled safety containers, away from any fuel-burning appliances, such as a gas hot water heater.
- Appliances should be plugged directly into the generator or a heavy duty outdoor extension cord.
- The cord should be checked for cuts or tears and to ensure the plug has all three prongs, especially the grounding pin.
- Use the appropriate size and type of power cords to carry the electrical load. Overloaded cords can overheat and cause fires.
- Never run cords under rugs or carpets where heat might build up or damage to a cord may go unnoticed.

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- Never connect generators to another power source such as power lines. The reverse flow of electricity or “back feed” can electrocute an unsuspecting utility worker.
- The house wiring should not be powered by plugging the generator into a wall outlet. If the generator must be connected to the house wiring to power appliances, a qualified electrician should install a properly rated transfer switch.
- Remember that FEMA does NOT reimburse generator purchases, except in extremely rare circumstances or for documented medical or extraordinary needs.

For more information on carbon monoxide and the safe use of generators, read this Consumer Product Safety Commission publication at: [www.cpsc.gov/CPSCPUB/PUBS/portgend.html](http://www.cpsc.gov/CPSCPUB/PUBS/portgend.html).

### Hoosiers Asked to Work Together to Cope with Heat

All Citizens Requested to Voluntarily Reduce Energy Consumption

The Indiana Department of Homeland Security (IDHS) is asking all Hoosiers to voluntarily reduce energy consumption as much as possible.

This is not a mandatory order, but by voluntarily reducing the amount of energy used, essential public services will have enough electricity to continue operations without heavy reliance on generators.

By reducing the amount of energy consumed, the likelihood of recurring blackouts from lack of available electricity will be reduced.

IDHS recommends the following energy conservation tips to reduce energy consumption:

### Residential consumers

Home energy conservation can not only reduce demand, but it can also save as much as 40% a year on electric bill costs. Consumers are encouraged to:

- Turn down **thermostats** down to 67 degrees. Programmable thermostats are a big help to assist consumers to reduce energy consumption.
- Turn your **refrigerator** down. Refrigerators account for about 20% of household electricity use. Use a thermometer to set your refrigerator temperature as close to 37 degrees and your freezer as close to 3 degrees as possible. Make sure that its energy saver switch is turned on. Also, check the gaskets around your refrigerator/freezer doors to make sure they are clean and sealed tightly.
- Set your **clothes washer** to the warm or cold water setting, not hot.

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- Turn down your **water heater** thermostat. Thermostats are often set to 140 degrees F when 120 is usually fine.
- Turn off or unplug all non-essential devices which use electricity (televisions, radios, computers, cell phone chargers, lights, etc.)
- Close off rooms that are not in use, shut off appliances and lights that are not being used are also easy ways to reduce consumption.
- Clean heating and air conditioning filters every other week.

### **Commercial and industrial businesses**

Commercial and industrial businesses can also take some energy conservation efforts by doing the following:

- Reduce office or building temperature at least 4 degrees from 8 a.m. to 5p.m.
- Consider reducing temperatures in municipal after 5 p.m. and on weekends.
- Turn off all non-essential lighting (i.e. lights on the statue, flag, clock, and some over-lit areas).
- Reduce temperatures on water heaters in municipal buildings to a minimum setting.
- Turn off copy machines/computers when not in use for an hour or more.
- Turn off office lighting when not in use.
- Notify the organization's facilities management department of areas that are over-lit so they can be turned off.
- Employees and visitors in commercial and industrial facilities are also encouraged to use the stairs instead of the elevator when possible/.